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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ACCRA 002150

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AFSI](#) [GH](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: GHANA: DEMOCRACY BUILDING SUCCESSES

REF: A. SECSTATE 182307

[B](#). ACCRA 00889

[C](#). ACCRA 01644

[D](#). GUEST-BRIDGEWATER EMAIL

[1](#). Summary: In response to reftel A, post offers the following lessons from its efforts to strengthen Ghana's thirteen-year-old democracy. These lessons focus on our efforts to enhance the USG's credibility with political parties and human rights organizations, build capacity of local governments and election machinery, and influence passage of anti-trafficking legislation. End summary.

BACKGROUND

[2](#). Ghana is a constitutional republic with a strong presidency and a unicameral legislature with 230 parliamentary seats. Ghana has enjoyed democracy since 1992, successfully conducting four national elections and many by-elections. Ghana today boasts a lively civil society, active media, reasonably independent judiciary, independent Electoral Commission, and a good human rights record. There is generally respect for rule of law, a high degree of social tolerance, and no threat to national cohesion.

[3](#). On the other hand, Ghana's democracy is in many ways young and dysfunctional. Parliament is weak. The Constitution requires that a majority of Ministers of State (Ministers and Deputy Ministers) also be Members of Parliament. Parliament has only once introduced its own bill and it lacks the power to do so if a law involves appropriating funds. Corruption is perceived as a growing concern. Anti-corruption institutions are weak. Power is highly centralized, with all District Chief Executives and one third of District Assembly members appointed by the president. Traditional authorities still wield significant power, especially because they own most of the land in Ghana. There are few women or Muslims in decisionmaking positions. Rule of law is weak in many areas, including the police and customs service. Violent crime and narcotics trafficking are on the rise. Supporting Ghana's young democracy, through advocacy and USAID, INL, DHRF and other programs remains a top MPP priority. Below we offer some lessons learned from our democracy-promotion over the past few years.

LESSONS FROM ELECTION 2004

Lesson 1: Pre-election Outreach Essential to Building Credibility

[4](#). In the run-up to Ghana's 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections, post hosted separate representational lunches for the party leadership of each of Ghana's eight largest political parties, as well as the entire leadership of the Electoral Commission and several civil society groups. In each of these events, we emphasized our commitment to free and fair elections, regardless of the outcome. Poloffs and Pol FSN also traveled to each of Ghana's ten regions prior to the election, meeting with party officials and Electoral Commission reps, again reinforcing the importance of free and fair elections. This intensive outreach effort enhanced the USG's reputation as a neutral advocate for democracy and helped overcome suspicions by some parties that we were biased toward the ruling NPP party. An extensive election-observing effort, which involved 50 teams of Mission observers throughout the country (the largest foreign observer deployment in Ghana), also bolstered our credibility in ensuring this was a good election. When the opposition NDC claimed the election was rigged, we were in a position to counter this with observations from the field. We have continued to engage the main opposition NDC party with lunches and meetings, including with former President Rawlings, which has further helped reduce perceptions that the USG was biased against them.

Lesson 3: Encourage Local Ownership of Elections.

[5](#). In Ghana's December 2004 elections, the USAID-funded

Coalition for Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) fielded 7,500 observers from 32 organizations, a huge increase over the 5,000 fielded in 2000 and the largest number for any nationwide election to date. USAID-Ghana views domestic observers as critical to a free and fair election because international observers incur more expenses and consequently often cannot cover a country sufficiently to declare an election free and fair. Domestic observers also speak local languages and are more likely to detect intimidation or fraud. Ghanaians displayed a great sense of ownership over the election process and outcome.

16. USAID programs also supported Ghana's Electoral Commission in developing policies for improved voter registration, trained EC staff to implement correct regulations and procedures, and trained political party representatives to monitor registration and voting. In particular, party representatives developed a greater understanding of election rules and processes, boosting public confidence that the outcome was the result of a transparent, free and fair election. This also mitigated conflicts over voting results that often arise from misunderstandings of election rules and procedures.

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STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY-GOVERNMENT DIALOGUE
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Lesson 2: Build Trust with Stakeholders

17. On April 12, post hosted a Human Rights Roundtable for 18 NGO representatives, government officials and the media to discuss our annual Human Rights report and to convey the USG's commitment to combat human rights abuses (see reftel B). Before the meeting, we sent each participant a copy of our Human Rights and International Religious Freedom reports. At the forum, stakeholders highlighted their concerns about judicial corruption, prisoners who had never received a hearing or trial and abuses of the mentally ill and disabled in prayer camps. The forum gave Ghanaian human rights activists and the media an opportunity to raise concerns directly with police, judicial officials and other GOG authorities in a neutral setting. In addition to helping us produce more informed reports, our willingness to accept feedback on the 2004 report and to solicit input for the 2005 report led to increased awareness of post's role on these issues and to greater cooperation in information gathering.

Lesson 4: Focus on Government Capacity for Civil Society Input.

18. USAID-Ghana's flagship Democracy and Governance program, the \$11 million Government Accountability Improves Trust (GAIT) II program, strengthens linkages between district assemblies and civil society organizations (CSOs). The approach of its predecessor, GAIT I, was to build CSOs' capacity to influence local government. GAIT II is succeeding because it recognizes that local government's capacity must be increased to meet civil society's demands on it. For democracy building to work, the capacity of both must be expanded.

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STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENT AND THE JUDICIARY
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Lesson 5: Seize Opportunities to Strengthen Democratic Institutions.

19. In 2001, USAID-Ghana capitalized on a rare opportunity to energize Ghana's parliament. When a Member of Parliament made a floor statement on judicial corruption, The Speaker of Parliament referred the matter to a committee where it could have quickly withered.

110. USAID's Strengthening the Capacity of Parliament for Enhanced Accountability and Civic Participation program, however, provided the funding and technical assistance to the judicial committee to investigate the alleged corruption. High turnout at public forums on judicial corruption in the regional capitals and massive media coverage from fall 2002 to the summer of 2003 encouraged Ghana's new Chief Justice George Kinsley Acquah to incorporate recommendations from the forums into his judicial reform plans.

111. Parliament's investigation and forums made clear its unique role and powers to a Ghanaian public that had little experience with a vigorous legislature. Two years later, Acquah is still the highest ranking official in Ghana to actively speak out on corruption. He issues an annual report on the judiciary branch, has removed corrupt judges and criticizes other members of the judiciary for inaction and inefficiency.

Lesson 6: Coordination and Persistence Key to Pushing Passage of Legislation.

¶12. Through outreach programs, media efforts and pressure on GOG officials, post had an important role to play in Ghana's July 28 passage of anti-trafficking in persons legislation which had been languishing for several years (see reftel C). For months, Embassy officials pressed for passage in meetings with President Kufuor, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minority Leader and Deputy Majority Leader, Cabinet members and other stakeholders.

¶13. On June 3, Accra was the first post this year to hold a digital video conference with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP). The DVC was used to inform journalists, human rights activists and GOG officials that Ghana had dropped to Tier 2 in our annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. Just as the program began, post received notice that Ghana's anti-TIP legislation was introduced to Parliament after being stalled for three years. This DVC generated a number of news stories and editorials in the Ghanaian press.

¶14. On July 14 the PolChief drew from comments provided by G/TIP to present the USG's views on the draft bill in hearings organized by Parliament's Committee on Gender and Children. This presentation, which led to several changes in the bill, and the Embassy's close attention to the bill throughout its parliamentary readings demonstrated the USG's interest in its passage. A July 29 G/TIP visit coincided with the bill's passage, and post exploited the timing to host a press conference on trafficking and to meet key organizations and GOG officials fighting human trafficking.

¶15. Coordinating the Department's announcement of the annual TIP report with activities at post helped build momentum for passage, raised the USG's profile on this issue in Ghana and strengthened post's relationships with key ministries, international organizations and NGOs. In August, these efforts paid off as the GOG reported its joint effort with the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to rescue 18 children from a cross-border trafficking scheme.

BRIDGEWATER